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Vieille, Stéphanie

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# Nationalism on the Island

## The Legitimacy of Corsican Nationalist Movements in Question

Stéphanie Vieille, University of Western Ontario

Department of Political Science, PhD Candidate

### **Abstract**

The article seeks to uncover and bring to attention an important issue and nationalist struggle at the heart of the European Union. While casualties and bombings caused by the Corsican nationalist movement constantly occupy the headline of various French and European newspapers, it has received little attention in academics spheres. Yet, such movement provides an interesting test case for the analysis of nationalist discourse and the accommodation of minorities within European integration and the Europe of Regions. This article will start by drawing a short profile of the island before exploring the different stages of development of the Corsican nationalist movement. We will then analysing the elements that compose the Corsican identity before concentrating on the discourse of one of the most notorious Corsican nationalist movement. We will conclude by questioning the legitimacy and future of such movements within the European integration.

## **Introduction:**

When thinking of France, two conflicting images come to mind: first, Paris, the Cote-d'azur good wine, cheese and renowned culture, secondly, riots, strikes and discontentment. Various books such 'a year in Provence'<sup>1</sup> written by P. Mayle usually contribute to the image most foreigners have of France. Yet, most people fundamentally ignore the existence of nationalist, sometimes violent, movements in France. The Corsican case for autonomy is an issue that is constantly referred to by most French newspapers and in the mind of all French rulers, when it has in fact received very little attention in academic circles. This paper explores the existence and legitimacy of the Corsican nationalist movements. It argues that the Corsican nation presented by various nationalist movements was fully constructed by a small proportion of the Corsican population to acquire further political and economic autonomy in the ashes of the French decolonization. This article will start by providing a brief overview of the island and will be divided into three large sections. In order to support our argument, this article will discuss the Corsican nationalist movements under two different angles. In a first section, this article will focus on its evolution and formation since 1954. This section will reveal the different stages of development of the Corsican nationalist movement and its growing disconnect to popular support. The second section of this article will discuss the theoretical assumptions surrounding the construction of a national identity and analyse the discourse of the nationalist movement using the literature surrounding the topics of discourse analysis, identity and nationhood. The works of Montserrat Guibernau, Stuart Hall, Hobsbawm and others will be central in looking at one of the most active group of the Corsican nationalist movement, the FLNC. This section will deconstruct the FLNC's discourse and consequently shed light on the construction of the Corsican identity as a basis for nationalist demands. In a final section, a couple concerns will be

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<sup>1</sup> Mayle. P A year in Provence First Vintage Ed, New York: 1991.

raised vis-à-vis the future of the Corsican nationalist movement in the background of European integration.

## **1. L'Ile de Beauté**

The island of Corsica is situated in the Mediterranean sea, 200 km south of Nice. Its main cities are Bastia in the North (*Haute-Corse*), Cortes in the centre and Ajaccio and Bonifaccio in the south (*Corse du Sud*). It is 8680 square kilometres (1.6% of total French territory) and its population amounts to 260 196<sup>2</sup> (0.4% of the total French population). It was part the City-State of Genoa, which could not keep revolts down and sold the island to the French in 1768, who crushed the rebellion. It is part of the 100 regions (or *départments*) of France. During most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century, most Corsicans identified themselves fully with the French. Many left their native island to join the French civil service and other national administrations, on the mainland. The island has a tradition of mafia, revenge, and has been 'ruled' by Clans (affluent 'pure' Corsican families). This has been used by many<sup>3</sup> as a justification for the violence that takes place on the island accompanying the nationalist demands.

## **2. Evolution**

In this section, the author wishes to draw attention to the different stages of evolution of the Corsican nationalist movement. The writings of Montserrat Guibernau will be used to illustrate and test the Corsican case. This section will first discuss each stage of development before revealing its inapplicability to Montserrat Guibernau's description of the evolution of legitimate nationalist movements.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tlfq.ulaval.ca/axl/europe/corsefra.htm>. 17/01/06

<sup>3</sup> Savigear, P *Clan Violence and Political Violence in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Corsica* in Collected Seminar papers on Political Violence University of London 1982, 72-78.

Montserrat Guibernau<sup>4</sup> posits that such movements go through three distinct phases of development. It is argued that a nationalist movement usually originates from the upper spheres of the population, namely the elite, which finds interest in the possibility of an autonomous future and distinct culture. The intellectual community is believed to enter a production and organisational stage where they articulate the movement and the minority culture. The second stage is crucial in that it aims at igniting interest and gaining support from the targeted minority. Only in the final stage does the movement become powerful enough to attract the attention of the state. In this third stage, a large majority of the targeted minority deems the movement and its grievances legitimate enough to embrace it. However, there exists a great gap between theory and fact and in this case, between Montserrat Guibernau's hypothesis and the development of the Corsican movement. The Corsican movement, alike Montserrat Guibernau's description, could be said to enter three stages of development, which however greatly differ from those articulated by the aforementioned author. In this study, we have chosen to divide the Corsican nationalist movement according to its demands, political objectives, degree of organization and its support. This will allow us to gain an in-depth understanding of the roots and life of the movement and to see how it differs from the hypothesis and description of a legitimate nationalist movement put forward in 'Nations without States: Political Communities in a Global Age'.

## **2.1 (1954-1979) Birth and organisation of the movement**

Alan Cairns posits that the rupture from the traditional management of relationship between center-periphery, is often to blame for the emergence of nationalist movements<sup>5</sup>. It may well be true in the case of the Corsican nationalist movement which emerged from the Corsican

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<sup>4</sup> Montserrat Guibernau "Nations Without States : Political Communities in a Global Age." (Polity, Cambridge:1999), 101.

<sup>5</sup> Cairns.A et al., Citizenship, Diversity and Pluralism: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives (McGill University Press, Toronto: 2000).

population's dissatisfaction with the socio-economic situation of their island and the retreat of France from its former colonies of Indochina (1945) and Algeria (1962). Both events triggered a deep re-evaluation of the island's role and its relationship with the French state. Corsica had poor infrastructures, roads that were limited to coastal towns and a weak economy that led its inhabitants to leave the island. Still today, a large proportion of Corsicans live in cities along the Mediterranean sea, where Marseille and Toulon are known for their important Corsican population.<sup>6</sup> It is important to stress that the initial momentum, gatherings and grievances had no clear-cut political objectives<sup>7</sup>. More than anything, they were socio-economic demands sprinkled with a need for regional particularism<sup>8</sup>. As a result to such demands, the Regional Action Plan was launched in 1957<sup>9</sup>. It recognized the economic difficulties of the island and proposed a range of possible initiatives for reform. The plan was perceived as too little by the nationalist forces and a vast majority of the Corsican population that remained on the island. The sixties, along with the first returnees from North African colonies who chose to settle in Corsica saw the birth of the first violent clandestine groups and the bombings of properties and crops. These bombings were a demonstration of discontent under a nationalist cover, which slowly started to articulate around demands for cultural recognition. However, it is not until the incident of Aleria<sup>10</sup> (1975-hostage and death of non-Corsican landowners) and the first death caused by the movement that the nationalists started radicalising and regrouping themselves under the umbrella of several groups such as the UPC (*Unione di u Populu Corsu*), FPCL (*Fronte Paisanu Corsu di*

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<sup>6</sup> Lauwers.L Available at [National Liberation Front of Corsica](#) (06/06/06)

<sup>7</sup> Smyrl. M, '*France :Challenging the Unitary State*' in Amoretti. A, Bermeo. N, '*Federalism and Territorial Cleavages*' (John Hopkins University Press, USA: 2004), 201-226.

<sup>8</sup> Loughlin. J '*Peace in the Basque Country and Corsica?*' in Cox. M, Guelke. A, Stephen. F '*A Farewell to Arms: From long wars to long Peace in Northern Ireland*' (Manchester University Press, Manchester: 2000), 234-248.

<sup>9</sup> Loughlin, *op.cit*,242.

<sup>10</sup> Moszeck. P *Le Drame d'un Clan* in *l'express* Available at <http://www.lexpress.fr/info/france/dossier/corse/dossier.asp?ida=417441> (19/01/06)

*Liberazione*) and most notorious of all, the FLNC (*Frontu di Liberazioni Naziunali di a Corsica*).

In less than twenty years, the movement evolved from purely socio-economic demands expressed by the population to sporadic violence and demands of cultural recognition by well organized armed groups. This period provided the foundation of the movement and saw its departure from the popular support it gained initially. Unlike Montserrat Guibernau's first stage, the presence and work of intellectuals is clearly absent from the initial stage of the Corsican autonomist movement. It was indeed created by the population which was dissatisfied with socio-economic circumstances. 'Discontent has helped to nationalize'<sup>11</sup> the island's issues and politics. The core of the initial movement stemmed mainly from economic and social discontentment. Nationalist claims were added by the skilful few (elite) as an attempt to further legitimize Corsican demands and secure larger momentum.

## **2.2 (1980-1998) Radicalization**

For decades, the French government responded with a mix of repression and concession that convinced various clandestine groups of the incapacity and unwillingness of the government to grant their demands and acknowledge the Corsican nation. It is only in 1982, with the launch of decentralization of the French administration that the island obtained a 'statut particulier' which gave it a regional assembly (composed of Corsican elected representatives) and various regional committees that were given the task of dealing with cultural, environmental and economic particularities<sup>12</sup>. This period saw the division of the nationalist autonomist movements and the reformulation of their grievances. While many joined these institutions and saw them as

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<sup>11</sup> Gourevitch.P, *The reemergence of peripheral nationalism: some comparative speculations on the spatial distribution of political leadership and economic growth* in Comparative Studies in Society and History Vol.21 n.3 (1979), 12.

<sup>12</sup> Loughlin, op.cit.242.

a unique opportunity, some groups such as the FLNC, saw this as an attempt to destroy the impetus of the movement and a further deception from the French government. Demands for recognition turned into demands for autonomy. Violence increased in intensity and became more widespread<sup>13</sup>. In an attempt to reduce the upsurge, the government decided to grant further autonomy to the region with the 1991 'Statut Joxe', which raised the legal status of the island to that of territoire d'outre mer (French overseas territories such as La Reunion, benefit from a larger degree of self-rule and decision making)<sup>14</sup>. While the majority seemed satisfied with the steps taken by the French government to accommodate their demands, violence did not retreat and escalated until the assassination of the Prefet Claude Erignac in 1998, official representative of the French Republic on the island<sup>15</sup>. This drove the movement further away from its popular origin and delegitimised the movement in the eyes of many.

This second phase saw the radicalization of the movement in its demands and techniques. It is also a clear step away from the original popular upsurge into highly organized, intellectually supported, relatively isolated and politically motivated groups. While Montserrat Guibernau characterizes the second stage of a nationalist movement as gaining support from the population, the Corsican instance proves to be going into the opposite direction, turning into a movement driven by elites away from popular support, and at the same time, reducing further prospects of accommodation by the French government.

### **2.3 (1999- Present) Road to Peace?**

The Declaration of Fiumorbu (1999), an agreement between 15 nationalist groups on a common program to renounce the use of violence, opened up a new era of discussion and hope

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<sup>13</sup> The FLNC itself provides a list of all bombings and actions since its creation. See <http://storiacorsa.unita-naziunale.org/index.htm>

<sup>14</sup> La Corse, Vie Publique.fr [http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte\\_instit/instit/instit\\_3\\_6\\_0\\_q4.htm](http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte_instit/instit/instit_3_6_0_q4.htm) 16/01/06.

<sup>15</sup> Loughlin, *op.cit.*, 243.



for a peaceful future<sup>16</sup>. Although isolated acts of violence continued to be perpetrated by non-signatory parties, a relative period of calm settled.

The European committee of regions along with the European Centre of Minority Issues provided another unique opportunity for all regional and nationalist movements to meet and discuss their future. The prospect of further European integration provides additional occasions for regional recognition and autonomy with its concept of 'subsidiarity' and Europe of regions<sup>17</sup>. In 2003, a referendum was organized around the possibility of further Corsican autonomy, an idea supported by both sides of the conflict, which hoped for the end of several decades of violence and unrest. However, the Corsican population, or nation decided otherwise and narrowly rejected such possibility with 51% of the votes<sup>18</sup>. Much of the literature<sup>19</sup> on the Corsican case saw the end of a long conflict in both the relative peace that had slowly settled down as well as the refusal of the population to gain further independence from the French government. This would have been a legitimate hope, if it had not been proven wrong by the events of January 2006. Violence erupted again and caused the destruction of government as well as French owned private property (on 14<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> January 2006).

It is yet impossible to determine whether this third stage is the final one. It seems however that the movement has been moving further away from its initial purpose and nature, eventually isolating itself and turning into a nuisance for both the French government and the Corsican population. Montserrat Guibernau's hypothesis as a result remains inapplicable to the Corsican case. While nationalist feeling, identity and discourse were present and widely shared by the islands' population in the fifties, it is only several decades later that intellectuals

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<sup>16</sup> Loughlin, op.cit., 245.

<sup>17</sup> P.Lynch, 'Minority Nationalism and European Integration' (University of Wales Press, Cardiff: 1996), 181.

<sup>18</sup> La corse, Vie Publique.fr, op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> Loughlin, op.cit., 243.

articulated the political grievances of the movement. The Corsican nationalist movement seems in fact to have moved away from its popular roots and used its ‘ethnic potential’<sup>20</sup> to justify its political demands. As of today, the movement seems to have lost a significant portion of its popular support, leading to a possible redefinition of the ‘nationalist Corsican movement’.

### **3. An Evaluation of the Corsican Discourse and Identity**

The previous section has introduced the reader to the history of the Corsican nationalist movement and has illustrated the fact that the movement seems to have grown increasingly isolated from its initial support. Montserra Guibernau’s theory effectively captures the exercise practiced by the nationalist elite whose job it is to articulate the discourse and to turn it into a ‘high culture’<sup>21</sup>, or in other words a culture capable of challenging that supported by the state. Such an understanding of the work carried out by a small proportion of the population to construct a strong self- sufficient national identity is shared by many. Anderson<sup>22</sup> for instance describes nations as creations of the mind while Gellner reduces them to a ‘theory of political legitimacy.’<sup>23</sup> The literature flourishes with various theories of nationalism and understanding of nations, yet all reach a similar conclusion: that national identities are “discursively constructed according to context.”<sup>24</sup>

This section of the article will explore the construction of a “historical culture”<sup>25</sup>, before looking at how this cultural capital is used by the FLNC to articulate nationalist claims for independence and recognition.

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<sup>20</sup> Gourevitch, P, op.cit., 4.

<sup>21</sup> Montserrat Guibernau, op.cit. 101.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson. B, Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism (London, UK Verso, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Gellner. E, Nations and Nationalism (Cornell University Press, USA: 2005), 1.

<sup>24</sup> De Cillia. R and Reisigl. M and Wodak R *The discursive construction of national identities* in Discourse and Society Vol.10 n.2, 7.

<sup>25</sup> De Cillia, Op.cit., 12.

### 3.1 A Constructed Identity

Although the literature surrounding the topic of nationalism flourishes with various descriptions of how nationalist movements often result from the work of a skilful few who take interest in an ethnic and cultural potential, various authors seem to identify the three following elements as crucial components in the construction of a national identity. Indeed the cultural capital of a given group can be enhanced by engaging in the construction or solidification of a) a common history, b) narrative and c) myth of pure peoples.

a) The construction of a common history is necessary to sustain the belief that there exists a national community. The deliberate creation and renovation of history, traditions, as well as symbols and what Halbwach calls a “collective memory”<sup>26</sup> are perceived as common tools in the manufacturing of a national identity and community. The creation of a ‘Foundational Myth’<sup>27</sup> is often a central element in this exercise. The history of Pascal Paoli and his struggle to remain free from Genoa and France can be considered as a Corsican foundational myth. Most of literature on Corsican history includes the latter. Through this great character of history, the Corsican nation seeks to re-affirm its greatness and perennality. The myth contributes to the maintenance and survival of a distinct Corsican national feeling and gives bedrock to the nation. A sense of continuity and timelessness<sup>28</sup> is also introduced. Anthony D Smith<sup>29</sup> coins this element ‘perennialist nationalism’ and describes it as an attempt to date the culture and origin a nation back to several centuries. The purpose of perennial nationalism is to demonstrate the legitimacy of the claims put forth by nationalist movements in that the history and identity of the given group dates back to several generations and withstood the test of time and assimilation.

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<sup>26</sup>Halbwach.M, La Memoire Collective, (Paris, PUF 1950).

<sup>27</sup> Hall, op.cit

<sup>28</sup> Hall, op.cit.

<sup>29</sup> Smith. A.D ‘The Nation in History’ ( University Press of England, Hannover: 2000).

Traditions and symbols are also invented. Hall and Hobsbawm<sup>30</sup> argue that such traditions and symbols are used to anchor the nation and further legitimize the claims to nationhood. In Corsica, for instance, many of the burying practices have been borrowed from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Italy or France. Yet, they are communicated as long lasting Corsican traditions<sup>31</sup> that have withstood the test of time.

b) The narrative of a nation is perhaps the most encompassing and interesting aspect in the construction of a national identity. It is also intimately linked to the construction of a common history as discussed earlier. Uri Ram reduces the definition of nationalism to a “narrative”<sup>32</sup> that gives meaning to the world in an attempt to justify its own existence. It is a teleological exercise of ongoing appropriation that seeks “the symbolic construction of communities.”<sup>33</sup> Elements of history and society are collected and re-used to fit the Corsican nationalist discourse and purpose. Hall suggests that it is the primary means through which a national identity is communicated and passed on from generation to generation. It is aimed at creating a bond, a self-generating feeling of belonging and nation-ness. In this case, the Corsican nationalists claim a distinct history from that of France. Corsica, is described as a victim that has suffered a long history of occupation and invasion. According to Corsican nationalist, the island has fought for its freedom but has been assimilated into the French nation against its will.

c) The Corsican people is presented as a strong and resilient people. The myth of the ‘pure original people’<sup>34</sup> is an important component of the construction a national identity. The history of Corsica is one that has suffered multiple invasion and occupation before finally being included into the French state. The so called purity of the Corsican people is therefore very

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<sup>30</sup> (1983)

<sup>31</sup> Obsèques Corse, <http://www.obseques-liberte.com/rites-funeraires/corse.htm> 25/01/06

<sup>32</sup> 1994 p153).

<sup>33</sup> Cohen. A, The symbolic construction of community (Tavistock Publications, London: 1985), 116.

<sup>34</sup> Hall, op.cit

questionable. Various nationalist groups however, like to think of themselves and the nation as a pure people attached to its land, respectful of the traditions and strong enough to survive the torments of occupation. By targeting ‘foreign’ alias non-Corsican owned property, autonomist groups aim at protecting their land and the purity of its people. It is common knowledge among French non-Corsican citizens, that without a Corsican last name to put on the mailbox, settling down on the island is simply not an option for fear of reprisals. Various Corsican real estate agencies do not hesitate to discuss such latent understanding of the situation with potential non-Corsican buyers<sup>35</sup>.

### **3.2 The Three Dimensional Discourse**

The previous section has introduced the reader to the work carried out by the elite according to the literature surrounding the topic of nationalism. This section will go further by analysing the discourse of the most active Corsican nationalist group.<sup>36</sup> Although the Corsican nationalist movement is in no way uniform, the discourse held by various autonomist and nationalist groups remains similar. They are moreover, analysed similarly in much of the literature, which little addresses the diversity of the movement. Ried, for instance in his article entitled “Colonizer and Colonized in the Corsican Political Imagination”<sup>37</sup> fails to even mention the co-existence of various branches of the nationalist movement. The need to explore nationalist discourses is stressed by Wright who contends that nationhood and ethnic identity is ‘constructed and promoted through discourse’<sup>38</sup> and is by no means ‘natural’. To undertake this study, we will be

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<sup>35</sup> See for instance GTI Immobilier, Available at <http://www.unita-naziunale.org/portail/presentation.htm> (06/06/06).

<sup>36</sup> FLNC <http://www.unita-naziunale.org/portail/gallerieFLNC.htm> 18/01/06

<sup>37</sup> Reid, D *Colonizer and Colonized in the Corsican Political Imagination* in *Radical History Review* 90 (2004), 116-22.

<sup>38</sup> Wright, S *Language and conflict : A neglected relationship*. (Clevedon: Multilingual matters LDT, 1998). 9.

using three elements of the nationalist discourse analysis identified in the literature.<sup>39</sup> The first level is the *moral* justification for the existence of the movement. Such explanation is generally articulated around the concepts of democracy, self-determination and human rights. The second level is rooted into *economics* and contends that resources and revenue of the ‘nation’ are being taken away by the oppressor, the state. The third level is *political* and is used to call for equality of all nations. This section will expose the work carried out by the FLNC to construct and support a coherent nationalist claim.

#### a) Moral appeal

The website of the most notorious Corsican armed groups (FLNC) is particularly interesting in that it appeals to the individual who belongs to the ‘Corsican Nation’. It puts forward all the attributes of the so called nation in the layout of the website: Corsican Flag and texts written in the local language. The following image is one that can be found on this webpage and which clearly appeals to moral principles.



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<sup>39</sup> Montserrat Guibernau “Nations Without States : Political Communities in a Global Age.” (Polity, Cambridge:1999), 103.

<sup>40</sup> FLNC <http://www.unita-naziunale.org/portail/gallerieFLNC.htm> (18/01/06)

The poster puts emphasis on the suffering of the Corsican peoples and nation which is tied to the 'foreign nation' against its will. The image reminds us of the black slaves, prisoners of chains and exploited during colonisation. In this case, the individual is a Corsican citizen whose eyes, throat and mouth are tied by three colourful ribbons representing the French flag (Blue, White, Red). The Corsican nation is chained, blinded, muted and cannot breath. Corsica is presented as a slave nation of the French Republic, which suffers immoral treatment. The message put forth by the nationalist movement is clear: the Corsican Nation must be set free. The PPC (Partitu di u Populu Corsu, an ancestor of the FLNC) is portrayed as the long awaited 'freedom fighters' which will break the chains. Another important point is that a veritable cult is made of all the personalities arrested by the French government. Their pictures are posted and actions are described as the actions of true Corsican heroes. By arresting their violent members, the French government is accused of alienating the movement and oppressing the Corsican freedom of expression.

#### *b) Economic appeal*

The economic aspect of the nationalist demands appears clearly in the actions undertaken and the texts written on the website. The French Republic is repetitively referred to as the 'oppressor'. It is accused of taking away the youth of the nation, giving it nothing in return, not even recognition. As mentioned earlier, the movement itself was initially triggered by economic inequality with mainland France during the fifties<sup>41</sup>. Feelings of suspicion and exploitation remain present in the nationalist discourse. While the whole of the French population saw its buying power/margin decrease since the introduction of the European currency, the nationalist movement exploits these difficulties to its advantage. Moreover, the Corsican economy remains

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<sup>41</sup> Smyrl. M, 'France :Challenging the Unitary State' in Amoretti. A, Bermeo. N, 'Federalism and Territorial Cleavages' (John Hopkins University Press, USA: 2004), 201-226.

dependant on eco-tourism and agriculture. Little else has been encouraged or developed to support an independent regional economy capable of sustaining itself. This, in the eyes of the FLNC and other radical movement, proves the latent French agenda on the subject. Systematic bombings of property owned by French, non-Corsican nationals aim to destabilize the French invasion and limit the exploitation (economic and cultural) of the Corsican land. The French invasion is constantly referred to by militants of the FLNC and other Corsican nationalist movements as '*la lutte*' (the Struggle)<sup>42</sup> and '*la repression en marche*' (the ongoing repression)<sup>43</sup>

### c) Political appeal

Along with the cult of FLNC's imprisoned members and heroes, the website puts together a coherent image of the Corsican nation. All attributes of the nations are put forward. As illustrated below, Corsica claims to have a territory, language, culture, history and a people. With the more recent institutions that have been granted to the region by the French Government (ie: regional assembly), Corsica thus corresponds to the definition of 'nation' put forward by many intellectuals. Kymlicka for instance describes nations as 'historical community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture'<sup>44</sup>. In this respect, the Corsican nation claims its right to be considered as an equal to the French nation and to be dealt with on an equal footing. Its political right to independence and autonomy ought to be considered seriously by the French government. In the eyes of the nationalists, both nations ought to have access to the same political right and recognition. The preamble of the FLNC's profile indeed stresses the need for the re-establishment of French-Corsican political relationship on the basis of equality and recognition of the Corsican nation

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<sup>42</sup> FLNC, Available at <http://www.unita-naziunale.org/portail/CNI%20BARCELONA.htm> (07/06/06)

<sup>43</sup> FLNC Available at <http://www.unita-naziunale.org/portail/acturepression.htm> (07/06/06)

<sup>44</sup> Kymlicka. W '*Minority Nationalism within Liberal Democracies*' in D.M Clarke & C. Jones The Rights of Nations: Nations and Nationalism in a changing world (Cork University Press, Cork: 1999), 100-127.



(*‘Établissement des relations nouvelles avec l’Etat Français sur la base de l’égalité et de la reconnaissance du Peuple Corse’*).<sup>45</sup>



#### **4. Lack of Legitimacy**

Before concluding with this study, a couple of concerns needs to be addressed. These are the result of a personal analysis of the subject and therefore ought to be considered as such. The first concern deals with the nature of the Corsican nationalist movement, or in other words, questions its ‘nationalist’ character. The second concern will bring us to discuss the future of the movement within the European integration project.

##### **4.1 Hidden Agenda?**

We have seen throughout this study, that there is a clear organized nationalist discourse put forward by these groups. We do not wish to invalidate or even deny the existence of a distinct Corsican nation and identity. However what is of interest here is the real intent and nature of the so-called nationalist movement. Indeed, a legitimate question would be to ask whether the nationalistic aspect and nature of the movement is not a cover for organized crime and some other hidden political agenda. At a first glance, the Corsican nation indeed appears to correspond to Kymlicka’s description of national minorities as ‘historically settled, territorially concentrated

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<sup>45</sup> FLNC <http://www.unita-naziunale.org/portail/presentation.htm> (07/06/06)

<sup>46</sup> FLNC <http://www.unita-naziunale.org/portail/gallerieFLNC.htm> (18/01/06)

and previously self-governing culture whose territory has become incorporated into larger states.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, ethnic or national movements are also defined by Smith as ‘an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity, identity on the behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual potential nation.’<sup>48</sup> This is the aspect that we are particularly interested in. Indeed, the Corsican movement can be considered as an ideological movement led by a portion of the nation, as described by Smith. However, the question remains: is this movement truly acting on the behalf of the Corsican population? While the movement clearly pursues its own political agenda, how representative is it of the general population? The latest attempt by the French government to give further freedom to the island was rejected by its population in a fair and democratic referendum. The majority of its inhabitants neither trust nor support the autonomist movement. As it has been demonstrated in the second part of this paper, the movement has slowly alienated itself mainly by radicalizing its methods and rejected all concessions made by the French government over the last three decades. The movement is becoming largely known for its corruption, drug trafficking and money-laundering scandals. A younger generation of clandestine groups have seen the day and known and trusted characters of the movements have either retired or have been assassinated<sup>49</sup>. The most recent attacks have yet to be attributed and it is now legitimate to wonder whether the originally nationalist popular demands and groups have been replaced by Mafia styled terrorist groups with hidden political objectives under nationalist cover<sup>50</sup>.

## **4.2 Corsica and the European Union**

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<sup>47</sup> Kymlicka, *op.cit.* 100.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *op.cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Arens. F, Thull. F ‘*Partial autonomy for Corsica splits French government*’ (05<sup>th</sup> Sept 2000) <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/sep2000/cors-s05.shtml> 29/01/06.

<sup>50</sup> L’Humanite, ‘*Corse. Les contradictions du mouvement national-terroriste*’ Available at <http://www.humanite.presse.fr/journal/2003-09-11/2003-09-11-378561> (07/06/06).

A second element which, against all odds, will most definitely challenge the legitimacy and commitment of so called nationalist groups to its original demands of recognition and regionalism is that of European Integration. David Lynch<sup>51</sup> in his book entitled 'Minority Nationalism and European Integration' posits that the European concepts of 'subsidiarity' and 'Europe of regions' offer a remarkable opportunity for the accommodation of cultural minorities within their state and the European community. Indeed, subsidiarity finds 'an acceptable compromise between supranational, national and regional modes of decision making'<sup>52</sup>, hereby encapsulating the possibility of some sort of federalism both at the European and National level and allowing for a certain degree of autonomy. Although the term is widely referred to in literature and in various speeches, very little has been done at the national level to enforce the concept. France, among others in the European community is reluctant to implement such policy. However, there is a distinct movement in that direction at the European supranational and institutional level with the establishment of a 'Committee of Regions' as well as a 'European Centre of Minority Issues' both promoting peaceful means for minority and regional movements to exert demands. Moreover, both institutions are a proof of commitment on behalf of the European Union towards the possibility of autonomous co-existence between ethnic and national communities and a certain degree of self-determination. While it will certainly take time to reach such an ideal, it provides various cultural communities with an open window on the future. Most importantly, it allows the transformation of what Kymlicka calls radical and anti-democratic nationalist movements into 'forward looking political movement'<sup>53</sup>. This will put the Corsican nationalist movement, along many other similar movements within the European Union, to a serious test.

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<sup>51</sup> Lynch, *op.cit.*

<sup>52</sup> Lynch, *op.cit.*, 182.

<sup>53</sup> Kymlicka, *op.cit.*, 110-127.

## **5 Conclusion**

After offering a brief introduction to Corsican history and the development of its nationalist movements, this article investigated the three elements identified in the literature as crucial in the construction or solidification of a national identity. This article has also allowed us to gain an in-depth understanding of the Corsican nationalist discourse as emitted by the FLNC. In a final section the article has re-contextualized the Corsican nationalist movements within an ever growing and accommodating European Union. This has finally led us to discuss the nature of the Corsican nationalist movement and particularly two aspects: first, its questionable legitimacy in the light of its reduced population support and alienation; Secondly, its future at the heart of the European integration. This article has attempted to shed light on a movement that is generally ignored and reveal its lack of connection to the Corsican situation. Only the further development of European integration will either legitimize or discard the concerns raised in the final stage of this research.

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